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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY
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CURRENT INTELLIGENCE MEMORANDUM

SUBJECT: Parliamentary and Local Elections in Poland,
16 April 1961

1. Offices to be filled: 460 deputies to the Sejm (Parliament) are to be selected from a single slate on the basis of one for every 64,800 inhabitants. Nearly 200,000 deputies to National People's Councils--the local governing bodies at various levels--will be chosen on the same ballot, headed by candidates for the councils of the 17 voivodships (provinces) and the five cities of Warsaw, Poznan, Lodz, Wroclaw, and Krakow, which have voivodship status and virtually the same prerogatives as provincial governments. After the last local elections, which took place in March 1958, voivodships had 2,139 deputies, 322 powiat (county) councils had 17,586 members, 735 town councils had 23,677 members, and the remaining 8,516 smaller areas of jurisdiction were represented by 161,660 councilmen. Although the number of seats will increase slightly because of population growth, roughly the same proportions are expected.

2. Party participation: All candidates will run on a National Unity Front slate; they will be nominated by regional unity front committees composed of representatives of the Polish United Workers' (Communist) party (PZPR), the puppet United Peasant and Democratic parties, and mass organizations, some of which have enjoyed varying degrees of independence since 1956. Local PZPR branches will be presented as usual with a list of nominees to be included in the National Unity Front slate, but for the first time an equal number of nominations will be accepted from the floor and final selection of candidates will depend on open balloting within the party organization. It is not known if this procedure will be adopted by other parties or groups participating in the front.

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3. Procedures:

a. The Council of State adopted a resolution on 29 December 1960 calling for elections to the Sejm and people's councils to be held on Sunday, 16 April 1961.

b. On 7 January the presidium of the National Unity Front met to discuss procedures and to issue instructions to local committees.

c. On 4 February the Council of State appointed a National Elections Committee headed by Jan Wasilkowski, first chairman of the Polish Supreme Court. This committee, through subsidiary bodies, is formally charged with supervision of the balloting.

d. By 5 February most of the local National Unity Front Committees had completed their electoral programs. These will be the basis for the electoral campaign.

e. On 20 February the Sejm concluded its eighth session, during which it passed legislation authorizing the holding of local elections simultaneously with Sejm elections (previously they had been a year apart), and reducing by 16 percent the number of candidates per seat.

f. Local people's councils will register voters aged 18 or over for local elections and those 21 or over for Sejm elections either at the place of their residence or at the place of their employment.

g. The campaign opened on 28 February with a plenary session of the National Unity Front attended by high-ranking regime figures. A draft election platform was adopted, and the keynote speech was given by PZPR politburo member Zambrowski, who called for a "debate with the population" stressing the regime's achievements and giving full consideration to any

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"bitter complaints" by the people--particularly as regards lack of housing, inflation, a rise in the cost of living, and a recent check on the rate of wage increases. He called for the front to accept responsibility for failures but to stress that these can be corrected. Zambrowski concluded with a statement, reiterated on 3 March by party boss Gomulka, that national unity and international Communist solidarity were clearly in the interest of Polish security and world peace.

4. Significant features: In the 1957 elections, 16,900,000 voters, or 94.1 percent of the eligible electorate, went to the polls and elected 458 deputies to the Sejm. In one jurisdiction no candidate received enough votes to qualify for election. A total of 328,899 votes, or less than 2 percent, were cast against the National Unity Front candidates. According to the election law of 1956, balloting will be secret, with the number of candidates exceeding the number of seats by 50 percent. As in 1957, if the voter strikes none of the candidates' names from the ballot, he is considered to have chosen the names from the top of the list down (preferred party candidates) to fill available seats. In order to win, a candidate must receive over 50 percent of all the valid votes cast.

Unless the regime takes special measures to ensure participation in the balloting, the percentage of eligible votes cast in the forthcoming election probably will drop below 1957, when popular interest in the electoral process was at a high pitch owing to the successful political revolution the previous October. Anticipated voter apathy probably prompted the regime to link Sejm and local elections this year, on the grounds that voters will be more interested in local candidates and issues than they will be in national issues. According to one unconfirmed report, Deputy Minister of Interior Zygfryd Sznek--a man who helped "prepare the election results" ahead of time in 1952--has been charged with ensuring that the current elections go according to plan.

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